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Week of
May 4, 1942

Critics'

THEATRE REVIEWS
1942

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†"Candida" opened Monday, April 27th, at the Shubert Theatre.
†"The Life of Reilly" opened Wednesday, April 29th, at the Broadhurst Theatre.
†"Harlem Cavalcade" opened Friday, May 1st, at the Ritz Theatre.

THEATRE REVIEWS IS A COMPLETE GUIDE AND RECORD TO THE NEW YORK SHOWS

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NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN

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"Harlem Cavalcade"

NEW YORK POST
May 2, 1942

"Harlem Cavalcade," New Negro Revue at the Ritz

By WILELLA WALDORF

THE prevailing Broadway craze for "bringing back vaudeville," already exemplified by "Priorities of 1942" and "Keep 'Em Laughing," has been taken up by Ed Sullivan, the columnist, who introduced a Negro variety show at the Ritz Theatre last night under the title "Harlem Cavalcade."

It follows the same general formula as its white predecessors. The process of "bringing back vaudeville" seems to mean bringing back old songs and some even older comedy sketches, and interspersing them with acts from the night club belt, mostly with microphones.

The dancing and the harmonizing in any Negro show are apt to be so well done that eventually the very expertness of it all becomes a trifle monotonous. There are so many agile steppers in "Harlem Cavalcade" that it is sometimes difficult to tell whether you are watching Moke and Poke or Pops and Louie, but all of the dancing is good.

Close Harmony by Delta Rhythm Boys

So is much of the singing, although there were times when the microphones blasted some of the voices right out into 48th St. The Ritz is not a large theatre. Those who sang without mechanical aid managed to make themselves heard without difficulty and were, on the whole, pleasanter to hear.

Our favorite singing number in the show, it must be admitted, however, was put over via the microphone when the Delta Rhythm Boys, a quartet, did some close harmony about bones.

On the other hand, the Peters Sisters, said to be great favorites in the night clubs, found amplification a definite set-back in their act. Or if they didn't, we did.

The Peters Sisters are an out-size in sister-acts. Three enormous women with a rare assortment of double and triple chins, they warble with gusto and even contribute something in the nature of an elephant ballet.

We are informed by those who get around in the night club belt that the baby sister's version of Gershwin's "Embraceable You" is generally something to hear, but the microphone gave it a brassy quality last night. The baby sister is a sylph compared to the other two. She probably doesn't weigh an ounce over 250 pounds.

Tim Moore Still a Good Comic

Of the comedians, Tim Moore always amuses this department. He's dragged out the old graveyard number, and he's a "Judge" on the bench, and a doctor ready to cut up a malingering patient for his insurance. This is all genuine colored comedy and it's funny stuff as Tim does it.

Flournoy Miller of the famous old team of Miller and Lyles, however, seemed to be suffering from poor material. His sketch about filling out a draft questionnaire was pretty forced.

Noble Sissle, in nostalgic mood, did "I'm Just Wild About Harry," still a catchy song, from the celebrated "Shuffle Along" of yesteryear, and Ed Sullivan, the producer, emerged apologetically at one point and recalled World War I among other things. Mr. Sullivan used a microphone, too, a habit picked up, apparently, at Madison Square Garden.

The first act of "Harlem Cavalcade" is better than the second, and it could stand pruning here and there. But we found it, on the whole, a pleasant sepia show. The dark race generally has a simple, unforced quality about its fun-making that is often very appealing, and the comedians still follow the tradition of blacking themselves up like minstrel men.

Two performances a day are given at the Ritz, except Saturdays when a third midnight performance is added, and Sundays when the third show goes on at 5:30 P. M. At the moderate price charged for it, "Harlem Cavalcade" provides a reasonable amount of black-face entertainment.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
May 3, 1942

Footwork Fair, Headwork Feeble

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

IN *Harlem Cavalcade* Ed Sullivan has put together a friendly and happy-go-lucky Negro variety show whose only serious fault is that it is never very good. There is a strong flavor of the past about it, in the way of old tunes, old performers and, above all, old jokes; and though this has its sentimental uses, it also has its theatrical limitations. It's fun to have Noble Sissle singing *I'm Just Wild About Harry*, but there ought to be one or two new songs that are somewhere in the same class with it. It's pleasant to welcome back Flournoy Miller, of the old team of Miller and Lyles, but it would be pleasanter if he had anything even tolerable to work with.

The show is the usual alternation of hoof and mouth, and as usual the hoofing is much the better end of it. At the very beginning, in fact, there is a dizzying display of fast, low-down acrobatic dancing which, for my money, is better than anything that follows. A couple of guys called Red and Curley, who tap and paddywack the drums, have their moments, however; and a pair of dancing comics called Moke and Poke look as if they're heading somewhere, though they still have quite a way to go. The first-act finale introduces *Pushin' the Sand*, which is described as "Harlem's newest dance," but I failed to find anything very new about it.

As for the vocal side of *Harlem Cavalcade*, the less said the better. Una Mae Carlisle, who is very pretty, and the three Peters Sisters, who are very fat, do some extremely unexciting singing. And when it comes to the sketches, which are laid in such classic Negro habitats as the courtroom and the graveyard, the kindest thing is to say that the jokes are just where we left them 20 years ago. But in not nearly such good condition.

NEW YORK TIMES
May 2, 1942

In Which 'Harlem Cavalcade' Comes Down From 135th St. to Join the Broadway Ranks of Vaudeville

NO DOUBT about vaudeville's coming back. On Forty-fourth Street you can see Victor Moore; on Forty-sixth Street, Willie Howard. On Forty-second Street and up a bit on Broadway itself, two former burlesque houses have yielded to the blandishments of License Commissioner Moss and have installed variety to preserve the smooth state of the nation. And, finally, last evening Ed Sullivan, the demoniac columnist of The Daily News, found an empty theatre on Forty-eighth Street and brought some friends along to put on "Harlem Cavalcade" at the Ritz. That neatly spaces the theatre district's eastbound streets with vaudeville turns. Next week, westbound.

Fugitive from 135th Street, from the Apollo and the beat of the night club belt, "Harlem Cavalcade" goes in for dancing, swing, stomp, for the blare of the trumpets and the shuffle of feet, for the golden tooth widely shown, for eagerness and cheer. Out of Harlem a dancer is a sissy if he does less than a double somersault without hands, he is defeated if the drums are not booming. On the stage of the Ritz they are hopping and bouncing, they are dancing tap and tumble, they are singing swing spirituals and popular songs. They are using pounds of burnt cork before entering sketches set in graveyards. The Harlem vaudeville show, in short. And, in short, O.K.

Noble Sissle, who has been writing and singing them since France and another war, is on hand to carry the world back to "Shuffle Along" and "I'm Just Wild About Harry." "Red and Curley," who put themselves in quotation marks, are there to dance and play fancy things on the drums. Moke and Poke sing and dance, and the Peters Sisters, gigantic dames, go to town on life's varied melodies There is a gentleman who sings, wistfully tapping his nose so that the whole thing sounds like a wailing sax. And there are sketches.

Out of the spirit of minstrel shows, and of the spirit of Amos and Andy, "Harlem Cavalcade" offers "Midnight Sonata" in which Tim Moore and Joe Byrd now can be discerned as air-raid wardens—stationed in a cemetery. Another token that it is 1942: Flournoy Miller is filling out a draft questionnaire. It is Mr. Miller who also forms a part of the sketch called "His Honor, the Judge," variations on which can be found in most Harlem variety. And a good idea it is, too.

The Messrs. Sullivan and Sissle combined in the direction of "Harlem Cavalcade," putting it together for speed and change. Jimmie Daniels, Harlem's sweet singer, follows a sketch and precedes tap dancing; and Una Mae Carlisle sings some of her songs just before a frenzied onslaught by Mr. Miller. But, as usual, it is the dancing that counts. Tall men, thin men, young men and old—let the music start up and off they go. The stage of the Ritz rocks and bounces, the drums beat louder, the trumpets howl—and "Harlem Cavalcade" safely may be said to be more than holding its own as vaudeville hits Forty-eighth Street.

(L. N.)

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
May 2, 1942

Harlem Stars Open At Ritz in Cavalcade

"HARLEM CAVALCADE," all-colored variety revue, came to Broadway via the Ritz Theatre stage last night under the aegis of Ed Sullivan.

Boasting a long list of names from the town's better sepia entertainers, the offerings won applause from the generous audience, particularly during the earlier half of the evening.

Highlights of the evening were the Peters Sisters, whose smart melodies have endeared them to New York's stay-up-lates; the light-footed Pops & Louie, Moke & Poke in a merry melange of slapstick gags and patter, and Tim Moore and Joe Byrd, the latter especially in their "Midnight Sonata," midway in the first half of the bill.

Others who contributed to the evening's entertainment included Noble Sissle, Flournoy Miller, Una Mae Carlisle (composer of "Walkin by the River"), Red and Curley, Hawley and Lee, the personable Miller Brothers and Lois, Wini and Bob Johnson, the Five Crackerjacks, Amanda Randolph, The Gingersnaps, Tom Fletcher, Jimmie Daniels, Garland Wilson, Edward Steele and The Sixteen Harlemaniacs, who in anything but a sepia revue would be billed as the chorus.

(G.E.B.)

"Harlem Cavalcade"

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
May 2, 1942

In 'Harlem Cavalcade' You Get First Class Colored Vaudeville

"Harlem Cavalcade," all-colored vaudeville revue assembled by Ed Sullivan. Produced at the Ritz Theatre, New York, May 1, 1942.

★ ★+

By BURNS MANTLE

YOU couldn't keep Ed Sullivan out of show business. Not that fella. Not after years and years of contacts along the Dawn Patrol. Not after a fling with "Crazy With the Heat," with which enterprise he threw a boxoffice thermometer into reverse, started it going up instead of down last season, and came within that much of reversing a negative Broadway verdict.

Now Mr. Sullivan is at it again with an assembled revue of all-colored talent. "Harlem Cavalcade" he calls the show. It opened last night at the Ritz. In its list of principals you will be able to find at least 80 per cent. I'd say, of the best colored talent in vaudeville.

It is what the poster writers speak of as "a gay melange of mirth and melody." Heavier on the melody than the mirth, and heaviest of all on the dancing features.

The competition in tap dancing among the Harlem boys and girls has kept them literally on their toes for a generation. Now they can give you about everything there is to give in this division.

Stage Jiggles, Too

It seemed to me after the curtain rose that the whole troupe spent the next quarter hour tap dancing. "Bandanna Days" was the song, and the specialists came in twosomes, threesomes, foursomes and singles.

At times the stage seemed to be dancing, too. That's the spirit of the colored show that arouses its devotees. Were I Mr. Sullivan I'd cut five minutes out of that opening sequence, but if you were to ask me where I probably couldn't tell you.

However, that is a weakness of colored shows as well as white. Their performers can't let go. Give them any encouragement and they must go on and on and on. All right for the fans, but hard on the casuals. Both publics must be pleased.

This troupe also has graceful chorus ensembles, and unusually attractive girls. They swing into a full stage number; following Jimmie Daniels, singer, and his two pianists, Garland Wilson and Edward Steele, and do themselves proud.

Specialists Win

But it is the specialists the crowd rises to —Miller Brothers and Lois, who take their taps to the pedestal tops quite spectacularly; Moke and Poke, a pair of agile and good-humored youngsters; Red and Curly; Wini and Bob Johnson; Pops and Louie—they are all smart hoofers.

Noble Sissle, co-producer, is also present as a reminder of the days when his "Shuffle Along" was the first colored revue hit. Noble revives his "I'm Just Wild About Harry" and that's pleasant. At the show's end he sings a rousing patriotic number about the Unknown Soldier's coming to life for another try at the enemy.

The Peters Sisters sing and waddle effectively, representing by their own boast "A Ton of Harmony and Rhythm." Flournoy Miller is there, and Tim Moore and Joe Byrd. They do a couple of sketches in the tradition —the jedge and the prisoners; the sick man, the insurance agent, the doctor and the pretty nurse looking for the patient's diagnosis.

Little Miss Somebody, very pretty, serves as an announcer, very prettily. Una Mae Carlisle, song writer, gives you a few of her more popular numbers. There are a couple of melodious quartets, one hamonizing and jazzing a spiritual effectively. With the help of the Messrs. Shubert and Veronica, the staging and costuming are bright and new.

They tell me this is a vaudeville year. If it is, Mr. Sullivan had a good idea in rounding up the colored talent and putting it all in one show. Now you know where to find it.

'HARLEM CAVALCADE'

A vaudeville-revue with an all-Negro cast in two acts; dances staged by Leonard Harper, costumes by Veronica; production designed and staged by Ed Sullivan and Noble Sissle; presented at the Ritz Theatre on May 1, 1942, by Mr. Sullivan. In the cast are Mr. Sissle, the Peters Sisters, Moke and Poke, Flournoy Miller, Tim Moore, Joe Byrd, Una Mae Carlisle, Red and Curley, the Miller Brothers and Lois, the Five Crackerjacks, Wini and Bob Johnson, Amanda Randolph and others.

NEW YORK SUN
May 2, 1942

'Harlem Cavalcade,' A Dance Show, Opens At the Ritz Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

IT IS barely possible that the supply of good tap dancers slightly exceeds the demand. This generalization is provoked by "Harlem Cavalcade," which opened at the Ritz Theater last evening and which bulges with tap dancers, most of them pretty good. It also has singers and black-faced comedians and five men who throw themselves madly about the stage, turning impossible somersaults in mid-air. But mostly it has dancers.

If you cannot get enough of dancing, it may very well be the show for you. If you incline at all to the notion that a man who has seen one tap dancer has seen them all, or even harbor the mild suspicion that half a dozen dance numbers are plenty of dance numbers for one evening, you may find that "Harlem Cavalcade" begins to pall after the first third or so. You may begin to speculate on the law of diminishing returns, which stipulates that the tenth tap dance isn't as good as the first tap dance, even if it is as good. You may even want to go home.

This is a moderately harsh attitude to take toward "Harlem Cavalcade," which is an unpretentious, reasonably well-staged, Negro vaudeville revue. It starts briskly with the sixteen young women—all nicely shaped and uniformly colored—who are called the Harlemaniacs. It goes on to the tumblers, who are probably the Five Crackerjacks, although here the program grows a little vague. Anyway, whatever their names, they are fascinating and grandly defy gravity's simple laws. And after that you begin to get dances. All very fine dances, some with patter and some with songs and one with a variety of drums. And monotony begins to settle down.

It is broken at intervals, but never fully dispelled. Tim Moore and Joe Byrd, in blackface, crack it with a graveyard sketch, which is agreeably comic and not disagreeably familiar. The same amusing fellows are in a courtroom sketch and are apt to pop up almost any time. The Peters Sisters, all 900 pounds of them, sing lustily. The girls dance. The boys dance. The girls and boys dance together. Pops and Louie dance. Moke and Poke dance. Red and Curley dance. The Miller Brothers and Lois dance. Even Noble Sissle dances and sings, too, and brings moments of distinction to the show. And Una Mae Carlisle wriggles on a piano bench and sings her own songs.

The audience approved throughout, and since none of the performers is inexpert there can be no quarrel with the audience. The audience is just made of sterner stuff than this department, that's all. To this department, "Harlem Cavalcade" went on a very long time and remained pretty routine. A hitherto unsuspected allergy to tap dancers, no doubt.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
May 2, 1942

Revue From Harlem

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

THERE always is something gay, infectious and high-spirited about a Negro revue. "Harlem Cavalcade," which was produced by Ed Sullivan, the columnist, has much vigorous and lively dancing, some pretty girls and the sort of racial good-fellowship that has a way of brightening these shows beyond their actual merit. Intended as a kind of spiritual successor to the great "Shuffle Along," the new work also goes in for amiable nostalgia as it presents a couple of song hits from its famous predecessor. Nevertheless, for all its pleasantness of disposition, "Harlem Cavalcade" is a pretty routine entertainment that is not at all aided by the routine feebleness of its comedy. It is an unfortunately commonplace show.

• • •

At least Mr. Sullivan's revue starts excitingly. The first number is, in fact, so merry and frantic a carnival of dancing that it sets a pace which the rest of the evening is unable to follow. There is a team billed as Red and Curley which combines dancing with drum playing in a highly commendable episode. A pretty young dancer in the person of Miss Wini Johnson, a handsome girl composer named Una Mae Carlisle, several gratifying looking chorus girls and such veterans as Flournoy Miller, of the eminent team of Miller and Lyles, and Noble Sissle are people who would be of help to any revue. But "Harlem Cavalcade" has a way of getting monotonous in its adventures with terpsichore, and the comedy is not worthy of a tradition which stems from the mighty Bert Williams.

• • •

There is, of course, the comic skit wherein two frightened ebon gentlemen find themselves alone in a graveyard at midnight. Obviously there must be the sketch wherein a disreputable judge dispenses shady justice and is very flirtatious. The former episode is not successfully modernized by the introduction of an air-raid warden, and the second is but mildly brought up to date by the addition to the cast of a good-looking girl lawyer. Such numbers, it is true, have resulted in wonderful hilarity in the past, but in this case they have aged as gloomily as Victor Moore's "Change Your Act or Go Back to the Woods." Even though "Harlem Cavalvade" has a frank sentimental appeal in this day of national nostalgia in entertainment, it is far from a good show.

"Harlem Cavalcade"

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
May 4, 1942

Harlem Cavalcade Is More Vaudeville

By JOHN MASON BROWN

MAYBE, if you had never seen anything like it before, Harlem Cavalcade would strike you as being more than passable, even when the second half has got under way, inviting you to see much the same thing all over again. I say maybe.

No one can deny that Ed Sullivan has assembled a company of high-steppin', light-footed, and music-possessed sepias who know how to strut their way around a tune. The Five Crackerjacks are comic tumblers who can put the Japs to shame. Red and Curley can do wonders serving as echoes to a set of drums in their dancing. Moke and Poke are likewise extraordinary expert at interrupting their caperings to knock each other to the floor after uttering their sour rhymes. And Lois and the Miller Brothers prance fearlessly and well on dizzying contraptions.

* * *

Yet at the Ritz virtue soon ceases to be its own reward. Believe it or not, before long the uniform excellence of the dancing becomes monotonous. Well, if not that, at least it proves unexceptional enough to lose its wonder. And confusing, too. Because all these good dancers who are hard to identify soon begin to seem as much alike, in spite of all their differences, as so many watermelon seeds.

I must admit I had a good time for the first half hour of Harlem Cavalcade. It was only after the similarity set in, and the second half was heavily upon me, that the fun died—and died in a big way. Although Jimmie Daniels' attempts to combine easy French with Tin Pan Alley English curdled my enjoyment considerably, even before the intermission, I did realize how capable were Garland Wilson and Edward Steele, the pianists who accompanied him.

I had laughed even at such familiar blackface sketches as the courtroom scene and the graveyard episode in which Tim Moore and Joe Byrd appeared. And I had enjoyed Monte Hawley and Johnny Lee in their John Doe Meets John Law skit.

* * *

Had I gone after the first half I would have been happy to say (although it is stingy praise) that I liked Harlem Cavalcade better than Keep 'Em Laughing. It was the second half which froze my face and turned my hitherto smiling companion into someone resembling the Iron Maiden at Nurenburg. As an old devotee of Shuffle Along, I was of course delighted to see Noble Sissle cutting corners again in I'm Just Wild About Harry. And I was pleased to remeet Flournoy Miller, though I wish his spoofing of the Draft questionnaire had been more amusingly written.

What got me down was the simple fact that all the new numbers I was seeing finally seemed old, regardless of their merits. I began to realize that I had seen them or their equivalents not only in the first half but in every other Negro show I had ever sat before. By the time the evening was nearly over I had had far too much of an old thing. I wanted a colored vaudeville or revue assembled with more originality. In other words, I wanted the "program subject to change," promised at the Ritz. This, I regret to state, is precisely what I did not find.

"The Life of Reilly"

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
April 30, 1942

Brooklyn Baseball

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

IT ISN'T surprising that the eminent Brooklyn Dodgers should become the heroes of a farce comedy, but it does seem a shame that their adventures are not set down in a better play. "The Life of Reilly," which is about the antics of an amiable but dim-witted pitcher, has rather a funny third act, with a number of properly comical devices, but for the rest of the time the new play by William Roos is as feeble-minded as its central character. Earlier in the week all of us who attended the magnificent Katharine Cornell production of "Candida" saw how good the theater really can be. In "The Life of Reilly" we are given a pretty fair idea of how bad it can be, and, somehow or other, it does appear rather difficult to realize that the two of them actually belong to the same medium of expression. If I were a vengeful fellow I might have persuaded Mr. Stanley Woodward, the sage, to cover the baseball play to get even with him for luring me into writing about the ice show.

* * *

The author of the new play is attempting to write satirically about the love of the great Borough of Brooklyn for its noble baseball team. He shows a low gambler and his wife who are foolish and tactless enough to bet against the Dodgers, not knowing that the celebrated Twirler, Rocket Reilly, was no longer under suspension and was going to pitch against the hapless Giants. It seems that Reilly is a superstitious fellow, the victim of an unseen fortune teller called Mme. Waleska, and that Mme. Waleska has convinced him that he is going to commit a murder before midnight. It is, therefore, up to the gambler and his wife to make the great pitcher think he is a killer and it is up to all the rest of Brooklyn to convince him that he isn't, even though the poor young innocent wants to confess. Then the amusing act comes when a loyal Brooklyn policeman insists on third degreeing the pitcher into confessing that he is not a murderer.

* * *

Although Ira Wolfert, who is the highest browed of all the sports columnists and who lives in the apartment house honored by the presence of the Dodgers' Mr. Peewee Reese, insisted to me that the hero-worship of the loyal Brooklyn rooters is not at all the hysterically sentimental thing that "The Life of Reilly" would make it, I found these later scenes of the play pleasantly entertaining. I was also pleased by the proud boast of the pitcher that if he died in the electric chair he would at least be dying for something that he believed in—capital punishment. But the new play takes an unhappily long time getting around to its comic episodes, and although there are a few good things in the earlier sections most of the evening is pretty dismal. Anyway, the pitcher is pleasantly played by Peter Hobbs, while Miss Glenda Farrell, George Mathews, John Call, Norman Tokar, Miss Polly Walters, Miss Charita Bauer and, in particular, Miss Guerita Donnelly are effective. Even at its best, though, this cultural contemplation of the life of the ball players is nothing to make any one forget the great Ring Lardner.

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Critics' THEATRE REVIEWS

"The Life of Reilly"

NEW YORK SUN
April 30, 1942

'The Life of Reilly,' Baseball Farce, Offered At the Broadhurst

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

THE hero of "The Life of Reilly," which opened at the Broadhurst last evening, is a Brooklyn pitcher, and a southpaw at that. Having thus set his standard at the zenith, William Roos has striven to write a play which will be as goofy as life and to this end he labors with might and main. But nothing he achieves is quite so comical as matter-of-fact accounts of Dodger base running; nothing so achingly dramatic as that dropped third strike.

Mr. Roos's hero is a wide-eyed, stumbling-tongued innocent with a belief in fortune tellers. He is also somewhat in love with a girl from home, who has been faithful to him since grade school and who flits absently through the labyrinth of Mr. Roos's plot. There are other ball players, one of whom has blacked the eye of a bathing beauty during batting practice and another of whom believes that he has powers of hypnosis. The author's imagination can be described, haltingly, as boundless. There are also two gamblers, male and female, who have bet their nest-egg on the Dodgers to lose, being unaware that the great Reilly is going to be on the mound, giving his all for Brooklyn. When Reilly gives his all, Brooklyn never loses.

Much of Mr. Roos's plot concerns the attempt of the gamblers, amiable people at heart, to make Reilly believe that he has committed murder, hoping so to distract him from his duties. (His fortune teller, a strangely elfin off-stage influence, has convinced him that he might.) They go about this in a fiendishly complicated fashion, which involves dangling a hot-water bottle out of a hotel window, getting revolvers mixed up and hitting men over the head with bats. It also involves a comical chambermaid and, distantly, a Saint Bernard dog. The kitchen stove may be in it too, for all I can now remember.

And the whole business is, I am afraid, more often silly than funny. Mr. Roos is an author who progresses anxiously from gag to gag, and Roy Hargrave is a director who spot-lights each tiny jest as if it were a fragment of immortal wit. This is seldom true. Most of Mr. Roos's jokes are almost embarrassingly mortal and the best of them will one day be forgotten. (Thursday, April 30, 1942, seems the most likely day.) "The Life of Reilly" is, in a word, effortful.

Peter Hobbs is personally amusing as Reilly; Glenda Farrell and Loring Smith portray the gambling couple pleasantly enough, and there is no reason to quarrel with the acting of George Mathews, John Call, Norman Tokar, Guerita Donnelly, Charita Bauer or most of the others. The dog, nameless, is handsome and obviously eager to please.

'THE LIFE OF REILLY'

A comedy in three acts by William Roos; directed by Roy Hargrave; settings by Samuel Leve; presented at the Broadhurst Theater on April 29, 1942, by Day Tuttle and Harald Bromley. The cast:

Johnny Ramsay	George Mathews
Snake Foote	John Call
Mike	Norman Tokar
Rocket Reilly	Peter Hobbs
Hankins	Len Hollister
Frank	Francis Nielsen
Jackie Moultrie	Glenda Farrell
Smitty	John Shellie
Horace Moultrie	Loring Smith
Miss Collins	Theodora Bender
Mildred Walker	Charita Bauer
Harriet	Guerita Donnelly
Miss Red-Hook	Polly Walters
Cooper	Howard Smith

NEW YORK POST
April 30, 1942

"The Life of Reilly," A Baseball Farce, Opens At the Broadhurst

By WILELLA WALDORF

THE mildly amusing adventures of "Rocket" Reilly, an excessively dumb pitcher for the Brooklyn Dodgers, are recounted at considerable length at the Broadhurst Theatre in a new farce by William Roos entitled "The Life of Reilly."

Mr. Roos has invented a few funny ideas, every now and then he inserts a comical line, and along toward the end there is an uproarious scene in which "Rocket" is given the third degree and a policeman cracks up. "Rocket" is insisting that he killed a man, while everybody betting on the Dodgers in tomorrow's game is convinced he didn't. The third degree is administered in a frantic effort to make "Rocket" admit he's innocent.

But it's no use. "Rocket" sticks to his principles. Visions of the electric chair do not frighten him. He is a firm believer in capital punishment.

If Mr. Roos had taken his ideas and his funny lines to a good collaborator-director, such as George Abbott, who specializes in this sort of idiocy—or used to, at any rate—the story of "The Life of Reilly" might be a different one today.

Lacking in Speed and Hilarity

For Mr. Roos's play is inexpert and clumsily contrived, and the occasional comic bits are not sufficient to make it hilarious. Roy Hargrave's direction is inventive now and then, but the production lacks the mad pace, the smart timing of such a piece as "Room Service," for instance.

The first act seems interminable, and although interest picks up later on, the only genuinely amusing sequence is the third degree episode, and that is allowed to peter out into a mild and abrupt ending.

Farces of "The Life of Reilly" school must have about them a mad, intoxicating quality, and never permit the audience to stop laughing long enough to reflect that what happens is not only silly but quite impossible. Between smiles at the Broadhurst, there is much too much time to think, and long stretch stretches of the play are so poorly contrived that they become very tiresome indeed.

Acting Better Than the Play

The acting, as usual, is better than the play. Peter Hobbs is perfectly cast as the dumb pitcher who consults a fake fortune teller at every opportunity and doggedly does everything she tells him to do. The character is more amusingly developed than any of the others and Mr. Hobbs is diverting whenever he is given a chance.

Glenda Farrell as the blonde wife of a gambler who is trying to get "Rocket" out of the way so that he can't pitch tomorrow's game has a poor part that gives her very little opportunity to do much more than look fetching in some colorful lounging pajamas. Loring Smith plays the gambler well enough and there are good character bits by Guerita Donnelly as a talkative chamber maid, John Shellie as the house detective, Len Hollister as a harassed ball-team manager, Polly Walters as a potential beauty contest winner with a black eye, Norman Tokar as a worshiping bell-hop and George Mathews and John Call as "Rocket's" Dodger pals.

Charita Bauer, who was just a junior miss in "The Women," has grown up into a pretty little ingenue, while Mona, a huge St. Bernard dog, is led in occasionally for no apparent reason except to create a diversion. Samuel Leve's hotel settings house the play more handsomely than it deserves.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
April 30, 1942

'The Life of Reilly' Opens at Broadhurst

Play by William Roos Purports to Show Comic Side of Baseball Players

By JOHN ANDERSON

THOUGH there may have been funny plays about baseball players it strikes me that even the one in which the great Ring Lardner had a hand wasn't very good, and the item disclosed at the Broadhurst last night was enough to bring a blackout to Broadway even without official request. It is called "The Life of Reilly" and in it William Roos, the author, displays for three acts some doings of the Dodgers so foolish and pointless that I should think the Brooklyn Bums would take it as a plot against them by the Giants.

Mr. Roos' single joke of the evening is based on the notion that ball players are so stupid and ignorant that they move around in what amounts to semi-consciousness. This point is all very well but it can be made funny only in a play that seems smarter than the ball players it is razzing. As the basis for a satirical comedy such material is fair enough but from protracted and painful contact with "The Life of Reilly" I fear that Mr. Roos is kidding nobody but himself.

The chief object of his attention in a plot too complicated to mention is a great pitcher for the Dodgers, one Rocket Reilly, who has no brains but who is a wonderful southpaw. Rocket believes in a fortune-teller, and she predicts when the Dodgers will win or lose. She tells Rocket about a blonde, and warns him that before midnight on a certain night he will commit murder.

This section of the plot (which ought to be somewhere in quarantine) is then mixed up with Plot B which has to do with a couple of gamblers, Mr. and Mrs. Moultrie, who have bet their last penny on the next day's game, believing that Rocket was under suspension, and after these two ingredients have sagged hopelessly into a muddle, Plot C emerges, wherein Rocket is lured into trying to kill Mr. Moultrie, only they don't expect him really to shoot because they think the pistol isn't loaded and . . . well, good grief! It's so drearily idiotic that there's no point in going on.

If it were funny such a plot would at least be its own excuse, but it is so clumsily put together, and its humor, both of line and situation, occurs at such great intervals, that the evening simply bogs down, and stays down.

Roy Hargrave has directed a good cast to some frantic efforts, but the play, as Dr. Woollcott would say, simply fires on its rescuers. Peter Hobbs does an excellent dead-pan job as the witless Rocket, and suggest again that he deserves a better play (as for that matter who doesn't). Charita Bauer has a thankless part which is merely a waste of her good time and talents, and Glenda Farrell, George Mathews, and John Call do what they can with some impossible assignments. Samuel Leve's settings of a Brooklyn hotel are admirable.

Maybe the theatre's constant failure in such plays suggests that the place for all players is in a big park somewhere, surrounded not by dialogue so much as a nice high fence.

"The Life of Reilly"

NEW YORK TIMES
April 30, 1942

THE PLAY IN REVIEW
"The Life of Reilly"

By BROOKS ATKINSON

AS IF the Dodgers had not already complicated modern times sufficiently, they are now offered as heroes of "The Life of Reilly," which was acted at the Broadhurst last evening. "Heroes" is stretching the point a little. For Mr. Roos, the author, is suggesting that Reilly, the southpaw, and his two pals are below average intelligence. This point of view toward the Bums seems to reflect upon the integrity of Mr. Roos's merry-go-round; and his further contention that they have lost nine games in a row verges on slander. If Mr. Roos is a Giant fan, he ought to say so frankly.

* * *

Possibly he thinks it is funny to pretend that the Dodgers is a nervous team, managed by a madman and populated by mental defectives. Using everything in sight except the fire-axe, he makes his point. For "The Life of Reilly" is a slapdash comedy about a flawless pitcher who believes his astrologer's declaration that he is going to murder some one before midnight. To the best of his ability, which is not versatile, he does murder a gambler and offers himself to the police. But since his pitching is the most valuable thing in Brooklyn, the police try very hard not to believe him. The one funny scene in the play shows a policeman putting the pitcher through the third degree to establish his innocence.

* * *

Mr. Roos's comedy has been around for about five years on the verge of Broadway production. No doubt that accounts for his lack of respect for the Dodgers's brilliance and his whimsical notion that they can lose nine games in a row. And it also accounts for the age of his comedy formula. It is described from the "Boy Meets Girl" and "Room Service" period, when helter-skelter was hilarity. There are still a few guffaws in it. Give Mr. Roos credit for one resounding gag. A friend of Reilly is trying to persuade him not to give himself up to the police and charge himself with murder. "You don't want to die, do you?" she says. "I would be dying for something I believe in," he replies. "What's that?" she inquires. "Capital punishment," he declares with wonderful logic.

Inside some plausible settings of a Brooklyn hotel as Samuel Leve would design it, Roy Howard has directed a performance that is breathless and labored. Glenda Farrell is acting the blonde from upstairs with good nature that is easy to return in the hope of a better occasion. The Brooklyn ball park heroes are played by Peter Hobbes, George Mathews and John Call with an honest imitation of intellectual torpor; and a great many other blameless actors keep rushing all evening. A noble St. Bernard is offered as comedy relief—i. e., relief from comedy, and he succeeds in that mission. What he thinks of the Dodgers is probably nothing to what he thinks of the play. For the Dodgers are not so funny as Mr. Roos imagines. Several very ohesty ball clubs are going to find that out before this season is finished.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
April 30, 1942

'The Life of Reilly' May Make Dodgers Laugh, But Not Much

"The Life of Reilly," farce by William Roos. Produced by Day Tuttle and Harald Bromley at the Broadhurst Theatre, New York, April 29, 1942.

★+

By BURNS MANTLE

WHO knows? Maybe the Brooklyn Dodgers in person will find lines and situations at which they can laugh in the new farce called "The Life of Reilly" at the Broadhurst, though I would not advise them to count on it. For the rest of us, I think "we shoulda stood in bed."

This is an utterly implausible and generally dull farce about Rocket Reilly, a weak-minded but sure-fire Dodger pitcher who believed implicitly in the prognostications of a fortune teller.

When she told him he would win, he won. When she told him he would lose, he sneaked out of playing. When she said he was destined to commit a murder before his next game he obligingly tried to kill an acquaintance.

The one legitimately amusing situation in two hours of playing does not occur until the end of the evening. Then Patrolman Cooper, Dodger fan, called to arrest Reilly, who is scheduled to pitch against the Giants next day, proceeds to take charge of the investigation with enthusiasm.

The Third Degree

It's a clear case of suicide, says Cooper. It isn't, says Reilly; he shot the guy. He's crazy, says Cooper. He's not; he's guilty, says Reilly.

Okay, they'll try a little third degree work, decides Cooper. So they sweat the stubborn Reilly until Cooper is completely worn out and ready to confess that he, himself, is the actual culprit.

Day Tuttle and Harald Bromley have provided a good working cast and a neat Samuel Leve setting for the farce, which indicates that they really had faith in it.

But it is pretty hard to build fantastic farce on a realistic base, and neither William Roos, author, nor Roy Hargrave, director, is equal to this job.

Glenda Farrell, who made a run of it in "Separate Rooms" after most of her critics insisted she never would, is featured, probably for luck. Modest and capable, Glenda's work is cut out for her this time, and her opportunities are meager.

Peter Hobbs plays the doleful Reilly as convincingly as possible, and a numerous cast, including Loring Smith, Howard Smith, Guerita Donnelly and Charita Bauer, who has gone from braids to hair-dos rather gracefully, works with a will but not much success to save the show.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
April 30, 1942

The Life of Reilly Seen at the Broadhurst

By JOHN MASON BROWN

HORSE racing, football and the theater? Yes. But baseball and the drama? No. For some strange reason the two have so far refused to combine. Oil and water, or water and oil. Name them in the order of your own preference. Even so, they have not yet mixed. The national game as rhymed in Casey at the Bat served De Wolf Hopper as a curtain recitation for years. But that has been the nearest baseball has got to home plate in the American theater. Even the incomparable Ring Lardner and Walter Huston had their difficulties with it in Elmer the Great. Perhaps, therefore, it is not too surprising to find that the diamond does not sparkle in The Life of Reilly.

Although Walter Roos' new comedy goes through all the motions, it strikes out with almost insistent regularity. In the third act it has a Third Degree scene which is funny if for no other reason than that, in it, it is the cop that collapses. In the same act the dumb young pitcher for the Dodgers, who for a variety of complicated reasons has persuaded himself that he has really killed a man as a fortune teller told him that he would, speaks an amusing line. When assured that he will end up in the electric chair, Reilly says at any rate he will be dying for something that he believes in. "What's that?" he is asked. "Capital punishment," he replies in all seriousness.

* * *

But the evening as a whole is a debilitating one. For The Life of Reilly is one of those farces which, while always straining to be mad, usually succeeds only in being bad. As it wanders in and out of the bedrooms and writing room of a Brooklyn hotel, it consists almost entirely of noise, energy, foolishness and dullness. Its Dodgers are anything but artful. Although the play asks one to rejoice in their dumbness, it is not capable of making such dumbness diverting.

The result is that, while The Life of Reilly may strike Brooklynites as being treasonable, it convinces even loyal partisans of the Giants that it is boring. In spite of appearing as the numbskull Reilly, Peter Hobbs proves likable, which is something of an achievement. Among the others lost in the shuffle are Charita Bauer, Guerita Donnelly, John Call, Theodore Bender and Howard Smith. Oh, yes, and Glenda Farrell.

* * *

In other words, it still seems as if fans will have to enjoy their baseball away from the theater. Certainly if their search was for fresh air they did not find it at the Broadhurst last night. The auditorium was stifling; so stifling, in fact, and so palpably in need of air-cooling that it did little to help Mr. Roos' dramaturgy.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
April 30, 1942

Almost a Hit . . . But Just a Bunt

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

IT'S apparently such a bad season that they are now offering baseball at the Broadhurst. At least you will find on display there a playwright's version of the Dodgers, complete with screwy antics and frantic base-running. The players' names, to be sure, will be new to you. There is a fleeting reference in the dialogue to Higbe and Wyatt, but the manager is one Hankins, and the star pitcher is one Rocket Reilly. Mr. Reilly has quite a left arm, but almost nothing of a cerebellum, and the troubles that beset him go to make up a seesaw farce that stages a nice last-act rally but has too far to come from behind.

The play starts off somberly with the bird-brained Reilly suspended for listening to his fortune-teller instead of his manager, and with the Dodgers in a nine-game losing streak (a daring thought about a team currently going at an .813 clip). On the eve of the 10th game, the desperate manager lifts the ban on Rocket so that he can pitch the next day, thereby scaring the pants off a gambler who has bet his whole roll (against the Dodgers) on the game. When he learns that Rocket's fortune-teller has predicted that Rocket will commit a murder, the gambler gets an idea. At this point there are still two acts to go, and they go good and wild, with the national sport having less and less to do with the plot. Indeed, the same plot has dealt with racehorses, welterweights, Rover Boys and, for that matter, insurance salesmen, and by now is in some respects better suited to Potter's Field than to Ebbets'.

Even so, Mr. Roos has a fair talent for dialogue and a good one for gags; and his play should somehow be funnier than it manages to be. Only the last act turns out to be fun; the first act is dead and the second is ragged. Some of the trouble certainly lies in the directing, which lacks timing and punch, and in the actors, who throw away lines that ought to be good for laughs. But Mr. Roos is also to blame; besides having plot trouble, he tosses in far too many lines that nobody could make funny.

Peter Hobbs does all right as Reilly; and Glenda Farrell, George Mathews, Norman Tokar, Polly Walters and others are helpful if uninspired, while Guerita Donnelly plays a bit part with decided success. But *The Life of Reilly* would be a good bet at the Broadhurst only if they introduced Ladies' Day.

"Candida"

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
April 28, 1942

Katharine Cornell In 'Candida' Matinees

Fine Company Revives Shaw's Comedy Brilliantly Under McClintic's Direction

By JOHN ANDERSON

KATHARINE CORNELL gave the first of five special matinee performances of "Candida" at the Shubert Theatre yesterday afternoon for the Army and Navy relief, and if it is half as much relief to the Army and Navy as it is to the playgoers she should be appointed official heroine of the armed forces.

It is wonderful, after these arid months of dingy drama, to sit before a work that has the look and sound of drama, that has the resilient humor and high relish of Shavian dialogue, and that has the well-remembered, ever finer and richer performance of Miss Cornell at its living core. A huge audience saluted the event with proper enthusiasm, and the other performances, under the auspices of the American Theatre Wing War Service, are scheduled for today, Thursday, Friday and Sunday. It is a chance not to be missed. Who knows (if I may paraphrase an English joke) this may be the season.

Though "Candida" has been done hereabouts a number of times (twice before by Miss Cornell) this is the best production I have ever seen, as well it might be, since it has Raymond Massey as the Rev. James Mavor Morell, Burgess Meredith (on leave from the Army for this special engagement) as Marchbanks, Mildred Natwick as Prossy, and Dudley Digges as Candida's father.

Poet No 'Softy'

They make a fine company, and they play brilliantly together under Guthrie McClintic's admirable direction. In a play that has been done so often, and that has become one of the modern classics, all of the parts are well defined, and the scope of the performance lies pretty much with the players and the director.

Only in the case of Marchbanks is there a chance for a fresh appraisal of the character, and Mr. Meredith gives the play a bright new emphasis by portraying a poet who really does seem to be a match for the pompous pastor. His is no dreamy, soft-eyed, greenery-yallery, Grosvenor gallery, foot-in-the-grave young man, but a tough-minded youngster who, for all of his pose, is plainly a stronger man than Morell at facing reality, so that Candida's famous decision is based not merely on a Shavian hypothesis, but on appreciable fact. It is a portrayal that gives the great verbal duel scene in the last act the force and clarity and honest inflection of true drama.

This hard-bitten approach to the part does, I will admit, catch the great Mr. Shaw napping a little in his stencil idea of a poet. There are a couple of almost Yellow Book passages which Mr. Meredith tried to swallow to hide the fact that he had modernized Shaw's Victorian portrait, and that fashions in poets have changed. If Mr. Meredith's Marchbanks seems more 1940 than 1900 the distortion is on the side of present vitality and dramatic balance.

Miss Natwick's Role

Mr. Massey's Morell is a work of vigor and distinction which searches out every implication of Shaw's character, and Dudley Digges provides one of the best portrayals of the season as Candida's fatuous father—a part adroitly contrived by the dramatist to lighten the play with laughter and preserve it heartily in some hokum humor.

Miss Natwick takes the odd-afternoons off from the peculiar hilarity of her part as the medium in "Blithe Spirit" and gets most of the fun out of Prossy, especially in her long scene with Marchbanks, though I don't think any one has ever been as funny as the late Clare Eames was in the tipsy business.

About Miss Cornell's Candida there have always been two schools of thought, one that she is far too alluring and glamorous for the kerosene and onion aspects of Shaw's household wonder-woman, and the other, to which I again pledge my allegiance, holding that she is superb in the part.

Candida is one of the almost superhuman cases wherein Mr. Shaw expects to have his cake and eat it, too. She must be bewitching enough to dazzle Marchbanks and she must suggest at the same time the qualities which make her the perfect wife for a clergyman who is in love with his own vocabulary. It seems to me that Miss Cornell resolves the matter in a portrayal of great warmth and humanity, done with fine penetration and deep understanding. Every revival she makes of the play shows the expansion and ripening perception of her work, and it is a treat to have her back on our stage—even for this fugitive glimpse.

I wish she could be persuaded to go on, just for the benefit of the famished playgoers.

'CANDIDA'

Bernard Shaw's play in three acts, staged by Guthrie McClintic. Setting and costumes by Woodman Thompson. Presented for a series of matinee performances under the auspices of the American Theatre Wing War Service, Inc., at the Shubert Theatre on April 27, 1942. The cast:

Miss Proserpine Garnett.Mildred Natwick
James Mavor Morell...Raymond Massey
Alexander Mill.....Stanley Bell
Mr. Burgess.....Dudley Digges
Candida.....Katharine Cornell
Eugene Marchbanks...Burgess Meredith

NEW YORK POST
April 28, 1942

"Candida" Brilliantly Played By a Star Cast at the Shubert

By WILELLA WALDORF

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW once remarked that a play should be improved with forty years' wear. Otherwise it is not worth writing.

In case there is any doubt of the imperishable quality of "Candida," a visit to the latest revival at the Shubert Theatre will quickly dispel it.

"Candida" is now 42 years old and we have seen productions of it that made us wonder if perhaps the old girl wasn't beginning to show her age a bit. Curiously enough, it has seldom been Candida herself who has conveyed this impression, but Morell, her ecclesiastical husband, and Marchbanks, the worshipping young poet.

Katharine Cornell's latest appearance in the role yesterday afternoon at the Shubert, accompanied by a cast that would be any producer's dream of paradise, sent us out of the theatre convinced that "Candida" is a well-nigh deathless play. Of all Shaw's works, it must stand second only to "Saint Joan."

Miss Cornell Returns

When Miss Cornell abandoned Henry Bernstein's "Rose Burke" this spring after a try-out tour, it appeared inevitable that the Broadway season must pass without a visit from the actress-manager.

A sudden decision to do a few special matinees of "Candida" for Army and Navy Relief, however, found her recalling Woodman Thompson's charming scenery and costumes for her 1937 production of the play from their resting place in the theatrical warehouse, and gathering in Raymond Massey as Morell, Burgess Meredith for Marchbanks, Mildred Natwick to play Prossy again as she did five years ago; Dudley Digges as that bluff old codger, Burgess; and Stanley Bell, who was with her in "The Doctor's Dilemma," to act the curate, Lexy Mill. Mr. Meredith, now a private in the United States Army, was given special leave to take this assignment.

So beatutifully does the sextette play together that the matinee achieved the delicate symmetry and balance of a brilliant symphonic performance.

Miss Cornell herself seemed, if possible, even more luminous than she did five years ago as Candida. Her famous scene in the third act in which she is forced to choose between Morell and Marchbanks—and takes the "weaker"—is played with warm understanding and sympathy, and with a deep appreciation of the Shavian humor with which the whole of it was conceived. As ever, she makes a charming stage picture in the gracious costumes of the period.

Massey and Meredith

Mr. Massey's Morell is a man of force and standing in the community rather than the sanctimonious bore so often encountered in "Candida" productions, and his earlier scenes, in particular, develop the humor latent in the role, but not always so gracefully brought out. Mr. Massey does not make a "ham" preacher of Morell, but plays him with respect for his fundamentally sterling character.

The name Eugene Marchbanks almost invariably calls up in theatre-goers' minds a long-haired, emaciated, somewhat hysterical youth whose contortions are apt to become a distinct trial before the play is over. Sometimes, in fact, he carries on as if he were a blood brother to Oswald Alving in Ibsen's "Ghosts" rather than the shy but brilliant young man who falls in love with Morell's wife.

Mr. Meredith is easily the most engaging Marchbanks this reviewer has ever seen. His appreciation of the comic aspect of the poet's agony is superb. There is always a suggestion that the agony is perhaps more histrionic than heart-felt, and although he conveys the poetic temperament accurately, Mr. Meredith does so with a minimum of writhing and seething and tearing his hair. The interpretation blends beautifully into the pattern followed by Miss Cornell and Mr. Massey.

Excellent Support

Mildred Natwick's Prossy is a masterpiece of portraiture, as is nearly everything to which Miss Natwick devotes her talents. Eight times a week she plays Mme. Arcati, the flighty medium in "Blithe Spirit." The rest of the time this week, she will be acting Prossy at the Shubert. Shaw has, of course, made Prossy a figure of fun, but she is often a little pathetic as well. Miss Natwick brings out both qualities with a sure touch.

Dudley Digges seems to have been made expressly to play Mr. Burgess, the wily old scoundrel always on the lookout for a sharp business deal, and he is immensely funny at it. Young Stanley Bell, too, is perfectly cast as Lexy, the coltish curate.

Altogether it is no great wonder that yesterday's performance at the Shubert turned out to be easily the most brilliant dramatic event of the season. Entirely aside from the patriotic gesture they are making on behalf of Army and Navy Relief, we all owe Miss Cornell and her associates a hand for reminding us, after many disappointments this season, that the theatre at its best is still a grand institution. No wonder yesterday's audience arose and cheered as the actors took their curtain calls.

There is another matinee of "Candida" today and again on Thursday and Friday. Because of the great demand for tickets, an extra performance has been scheduled for Sunday evening, May 3. The actors are giving their services, Miss Cornell the production and the theatre has been donated by the Messrs. Shubert. Proceeds from the five performances will be turned over to the American Theatre Wing War Service which will divide the sum realized between the Army Emergency Fund and the Navy Relief Society.

"Candida"

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
April 28, 1942

A Magnificent Revival Of Mr. Shaw's Candida

By JOHN MASON BROWN

EVERYONE was benefitted at the Shubert yesterday afternoon, and will be, so long as Candida continues to be played there at special matinees this week under the auspices of the American Theater Wing. The Army Emergency Fund; the Navy Relief Society; George Bernard Shaw; his old comedy which came into a new and completely glorious life; the theatre which has been languishing all these starved months, and everyone in this war-torn world who was privileged to crowd before so fine a production of so fine a play. Count them all among the beneficiaries of this Candida. And thank, with a fevor as justifiable as it is uncommon, such actors as Katharine Cornell, Burgess Meredith, Raymond Massey, Mildred Natwick, Stanley Bell, Dudley Digges, and such a director as Guthrie McClintic, each of whom is giving abundantly not only his services but the best of his extraordinary gifts.

Not since the war began has it been possible to forget it so entirely in the theatre. Or to remember with such certainty, when the final curtain was down and a horde of smiling people was dispersing in the sunshine of the sidewalk, that the values represented by this Candida are the very civilized values for which any sacrifice should be gladly made.

Here is laughter, neither high-strung nor stupid, as a proof of man's enduring sanity; laughter deeply human, filled with wisdom, insistent only in its tolerant awareness of the ridiculous; yet such laughter as can come only from both the head and the heart. Here are individuals—frail, wise, pompous or silly—asking to be judged merely as men and women in their pacific relationships with one another. Here is a smiling comment on the disparity between the Christian ideal and mortal frailty. Here is wit wedded to compassion, fun allied with eloquence, craftsmanship with understanding, and an old play, blown free of the cobwebs some of us had thought had settled on it, by the sheer perfection of its acting.

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Miss Cornell has played Candida twice before but never so beautifully as she is now playing her. She is the Speicher portrait in the flesh, but granted a voice so rich and liquid that it lingers long in the ears after her final choice has been made. She is radiant, mysterious, compelling, all-mothering; sage with the sagacity of her sex as Shaw intended her to be; and yet simple as only a truly great artist can be.

Never before has Candida's choice been based upon so authentic a dilemma as in this revival. Mr. Massey as the sermonizing Morell and Mr. Meredith as the usually sniveling Marchbanks enter the lists as genuine contestants. Mr. Massey may be less portly than his predecessors in the ministerial role. Even when fed supposedly on the roast beef of Old England, he may appear a mere Jack Spratt. Yet he plays Morell with an admirable eye for character, with a commendable understanding of Shaw's intentions and a happy realization of his theatrical values.

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The Marchbanks of Burgess Meredith can only be described as brilliant. It is by all odds the best—indeed the only—Marchbanks I have seen in the theatre of my time. The others have been whiners or Bunthornes, so contemptible that the play has always seemed to be a two-cornered triangle. Mr. Meredith, however, turns one of the worst of Shaw's characters into a happily believable person. Mr. Shaw may have misunderstood his pure artist because he so despises the type, but Mr. Meredith is able to play Marchbanks so that we all admire him. He acts him with rare humor and a welcome quietness. Indeed, Private Meredith shows once again what an exceptional actor he is. Not even in Winterset has he demonstrated his unusual abilities to better advantage than he is now doing.

Dudley Digges is a magnificent Burgess. He dodges all the stock company temptations of the part. He acts with wonderful humor and a veteran's authority. Mildred Natwick, who is so convulsing these nights as the medium in Blithe Spirit, is an even more hilarious Prossy than she first created. Hers is a superlative job; ludicrous without being overstrained, and as precise as it is uproarious. As the eager young curate Stanley Bell is also delightful.

Although this Candida is an all-star revival it suffers from none of the faults of such shenanigans. Mr. McClintic has seen to this in his perfectly stressed direction. So have the players who, acting for a good cause, play together with a skill worthy of the Moscow Art Theatre. This Candida represents the theatre at its most delightful. It is the happiest of many happy reminders of what our civilization can rise to, and why no one can fail to hold it dear. One only wishes the revival could run forever.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
April 28, 1942

Something Memorable

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

THIS is the finest "Candida" I have encountered in something like twenty years of careful attendance upon all the productions of the work offered in this vicinity. Burgess Meredith is the most brilliant Marchbanks of all the actors who have tried this difficult role during that period. "Candida" is one of the authentic classics of the modern theatre, standing with "Saint Joan" and "Heartbreak House" as Shaw's best plays. Having thus expressed a decent modicum of enthusiasm for the genuinely all-star presentation that Miss Cornell and her colleagues are offering at the Shubert Theatre for four matinee performances on behalf of the American Theatre Wing, about the only details I can add are that here is the most satisfying event of this bewildered dramatic season and that there is every reason to hope that this limited engagement can somehow be extended.

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The news of the latest "Candida" is, of course, Mr. Meredith's Marchbanks, since Miss Cornell's portrayal of the title part is already accepted as a masterpiece of American acting. In the past there have been some effective performances of the role of the intense young poet, who can so easily become one of the most annoying people of the known drama. The trouble with even the best of Mr. Meredith's predecessors, though, has been that, in their efforts to show Marchbanks as a combination of selfish weakling and honest poetic talent, they have tended to transform him into a kind of hysterical minor monster, given to a sulking petulance. They have rarely bothered to make it clear just why Candida should have bothered about him. By the seemingly simple method of standing comparatively still and playing with a quiet, direct sort of masculine intensity, Mr. Meredith has given him dignity, force and intellectual honesty.

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As for Miss Cornell's performance, it is even better than it was when she last showed it to us, back in the placid days of 1937. At that time there was a certain air of condescension, a certain suggestion of a great lady's patronizing superiority, in her attitude toward her two men, which marred an otherwise brilliant portrayal. All of that is gone from her characterization, which is now so tender and compassionate and humorously understanding that it is a thing of rare and delicate beauty. There is a luminous, lyric quality about everything she does that shows to visual and spiritual perfection the traits that have made Candida, together with Saint Joan, the most winning of Shavian heroines. Here certainly is one of the finest things that Miss Cornell has yet done in her years in the theatre. She and Mr. Meredith alone would have made this "Candida" memorable.

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It happens, however, that there are other distinguished virtues in the production. Raymond Massey, for example, brings just the suggestion of warmth and humanity to the role of Morell which keeps that windbag of a liberal clergyman from being the annoying prig that he can so easily become. It is in every way a splendid performance. Then there is that other fine actor, Dudley Digges, playing Candida's scoundrel of a father with an unctuous humor that makes the role richly amusing and pleasantly racy. Miss Mildred Natwick repeats her excellent impersonation of poor Miss Prossy, combining the comic and the touching qualities of that unfortunate maiden with shrewd effectiveness. Even the infinitesimal role of Alexander Mill, the young curate, takes on life in the hands of Stanley Bell. In a word or two, I am rather partial toward the wartime edition of "Candida."

NEW YORK SUN
April 28, 1942

Shaw's 'Candida' Is Brilliantly Revived at the Shubert Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

IF YOU have been waiting for ideal theater-going conditions, you can now find them at the Shubert Theater. There you may see Bernard Shaw's "Candida," which is a fine play, acted as in a dream theater all plays would be acted. You may see Katharine Cornell, Raymond Massey, Burgess Meredith, Dudley Digges, Mildred Natwick and Stanley Bell together on the same stage. And every cent it costs you will go to the Army Emergency Fund and Navy Relief.

Like so many good things, the stay of "Candida" at the Shubert will be brief. It was played yesterday afternoon for the first time and is being repeated at the matinee today. It will be acted again on Thursday and Friday afternoons and on Sunday evening. If I were you, I would note down these dates, because this is something you will hardly want to miss. Yesterday, after the melancholy nights of a drab season, it gave all of us a glimpse of what the theatre can be when it really tries.

It is, I think, the most satisfying performance of "Candida" that any of us has had the chance to see. Miss Cornell repeats the luminous, infinitely gracious, performance which she gave in 1937, when she last played the title role hereabouts. The part is the best Shaw has ever written for a woman; there is a kind of wise tranquillity in the writing which Miss Cornell catches up, and amplifies, in the playing.

The role of Marchbanks, the little, eloquent poet who reaches for Candida's love, is by no means the best part Shaw ever wrote for a man, and it is one of the most difficult to play. Nine times out of ten it degenerates into shrillness—just as the opposite role of Morell has a tendency to lump down into stoginess. For Marchbanks, for all his poetry and his instinctive insight, turns easily into a personified whine. It does not in Mr. Meredith's playing, which has more than eloquence. His Marchbanks is not only the best I can remember; it is the only really good Marchbanks.

Mr. Massey's Morell avoids stodginess and contributes strength to Shaw's witty, sensitive picture of two wordy men in pursuit of a wise lady. It, like the two other leading roles, could hardly be better played. When you add to this the crusty comedy of Mr. Digges's Burgess, the sharp, delicious crispness of Miss Natwick's Prossy and the quiet bashfulness of Mr. Bell's Alexander Mill you have a production which needs no good cause to recommend it. That the cause is, in addition, so good a one puts a visit to the Shubert under the heading of obligations.

"Candida"

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
April 28, 1942

'Candida' Revival Wins Cheers For Cornell and Her Co-Stars

"Candida," comedy by Bernard Shaw, revived as a benefit matinee for the Army and Navy Relief at the Shubert Theatre, New York, April 27, 1942.

★ ★ ★+

By BURNS MANTLE

I SEE by the files that a young reviewer of the drama named Mantle discovered Katharine Cornell as the most satisfying Candida (the most perfect he said) of the American interpreters of that role as far back as 1924.

Allowing for the enthusiasms of youth (well, comparative youth, perhaps) that may have been a fairly sweeping estimate. But it seemed quite reasonable again yesterday afternoon when Miss Cornell revived the Shaw comedy at the Shubert Theatre as the first of a series of benefits for the Army and Navy Relief organizations.

On this occasion, however, the impression must be expanded to include the revival as a whole. The Cornell Candida is still the most completely satisfying interpretation of the role playgoers of the last 20 years have seen.

But now, in addition to that individual touch of perfect satisfaction, Mantle is impelled to add that this particular revival of the Shaw classic is, in all its parts, the best that has ever been staged in the American theatre.

Other Perfections

The Marchbanks of Burgess Meredith burns with an inner fire that has not been approached since Arhold Daly first accepted the role as a personal crusade for idealistic and slightly mad poets the world over.

The Morell of Raymond Massey combines with perfect balance the most obvious characteristics of the booming, or pompous, naive or simple, self-sufficient or misunderstanding, sincere though dull husband of that "most immoral" career-woman who elected to specialize in home-making.

The Prossy of Mildred Natwick has, since the last previous Cornell revival of 1937, topped all the others who have played this definitely rewarding part, and Dudley Digges, who got his Shaw from the Shavian fountain direct, does more for Burgess than any of his contemporary players could do, or at least more than any has done.

A Play Remade

This leaves only the fidgety curate to account for, and Stanley Bell fits that Alexander Mill bit better than most juveniles could.

So there you have it. If you like "Candida," this is a production that you certainly should not overlook. It will register with such firmness, I'm sure, that you will be remembering it with gratitude even when you, too, have put many years of playgoing back of you.

"Candida," as no one need remind you, is a play that literally springs from the hearts of its players even more definitely than it does from that of its creator.

Shaw never expected, taking his word for it, that his comedy should be accepted as so completely and even sentimentally humanized a living document as its interpreters have made it.

Not only is Candida remolded by the woman's intuitive intelligence and character of each of her interpreters, but Morell and Marchbanks as well, have acquired a spiritual stature unsuspected by their father confessor.

Each of the co-stars at the Shubert yesterday had an outstanding scene. The shawl speech, of course, and Candida's call for bids for Miss Cornell; the first scene with Morell and the scene of the flaming sword for Meredith; Morell's defense, with dignity but deep hurt, for Massey.

These are all read with that fine conviction that gives them both meaning and deep feeling. And that is what lifts any performance from the commonplace to an achievement that adds definitely to the glory of the theatre.

Guthrie McClintic again did the staging and the set and period costuming are from the 1937 revival.

There were many curtain calls and considerable cheering at the end. There will be three more performances—today, Thursday and Friday.

NEW YORK TIMES
April 28, 1942

Katharine Cornell, Massey And Meredith Appear in Revival of Shaw's 'Candida' For the Army-Navy Relief

By BROOKS ATKINSON

ALTHOUGH Bernard Shaw's "Candida" has been put on the stage many times, no one ever saw it until yesterday afternoon when it was really acted at the Shubert Theatre. For the Katharine Cornell revival for the Army Emergency Fund and the Navy Relief Fund is flooded with new light and is the foremost event of the theatre season. Many of us have seen Miss Cornell's Candida before. It is one of her best parts. If she had never played anything else it would be enough to distinguish her as a great actress, for it radiates from her as if it were her own nature—luminous, tender and entrancingly wise.

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And now we may think of Mr. Shaw's play, not as a celebrated vehicle, but as an association of several rare people. In Burgess Meredith's matchless playing, Marchbanks emerges as no whimsical half genius but as a sensitive young man wrestling with a real problem. In Raymond Massey's humane acting, Parson Morell becomes a man of superior stature who has the courage to learn the truth about his limitations. His surrender is not the humiliation of a stuffed shirt but the humility of a gentleman.

Some of us know what Prossy is like when Mildred Natwick plays the part with sharpness and edginess in a vein of comedy that does not throw self-respect away. As the curate Stanley Bell is also giving a good performance. But now we have seen Candida's father as Dudley Digges plays him, and that is a most revealing experience. Mr. Digges is an actor of rich imagination and enormous craft. He directed the memorable revival of 1926. Playing Candida's father, he has made a sentient being out of an old humbug.

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For the first time in this play-goer's memory the whole of "Candida" has been played by creative actors. Although Guthrie McClintic's direction is not conspicuous, the entire performance is shot through with the sort of understanding of character that he brings to a play. He has gone instinctively to the heart of the problem and woven a shining performance out of human experience.

Not that Mr. Shaw's best-loved play needs to be recommended to any one. It has always been a popular comedy; even when it is only half-acted it is vastly enjoyable. It is no clever Shavian invention, but a humorous and at times a touching portrait of human intangibles. When Marchbanks and Morell are played from the inside by actors who are aware of life in all its tenuous perplexity, "Candida" provides an especially glowing experience in the theatre.

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Let this department add a slightly bitter postscript. Why is it that we have to wait for labors of love to see the commercial theatre at its best? The five special performances of "Candida" are for Army and Navy relief, under the auspices of the American Theatre Wing. Give the theatre a cause and an opportunity to do something free and it has no trouble in solving the commercial problems that beset it. Then the art and the spirit that are pent up inside the theatre flow abundantly.

"Candida" will be played at matinees today, Thursday and Friday and next Sunday evening. Incidentally, it earned a gross of $2,615 at yesterday's performance.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
April 28, 1942

'Candida' Tops Season's Plays

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

YESTERDAY'S performance of *Candida* was the first of several matinees for the benefit of the Army Emergency Fund and the Navy Relief Society. But, just as clearly and just as commendably, it was for the benefit of all those who, sick to death of the trash and twaddle that have been piling up in the theatre for months, want that authentic and special pleasure that the theatre, at its best, can give.

For yesterday's production was the best *Candida* that anybody can possibly remember hereabouts, and as good a one as anybody can well expect to see. The distinguished cast is even better behind the footlights than it is on paper. And though *Candida* has never been my favorite Shaw, yesterday it seemed not only witty and ingenious, as it always does, but alive and warm and even moving.

For one thing, the play's worst obstacle—which appeared to be insurmountable—has been adrmounted. The character of Marchbanks has been at best irritating and at worst insufferable; he has always seemed the most foolish of all our latterday Shelleys. But Burgess Meredith, giving perhaps the best performance of his career, has produced a mettlesome rather than moony poet; has made him seem boyish rather than cocksure; has given him, if not a sense of humor, at least enough of a sense of humor to know that he lacks one. He has made him bearable, which is as praiseworthy as making him convincing.

Raymond Massey has made the Rev. James Mavor Morell very bearable, too; has conveyed those qualities which, in spite of all the starch and stuffiness in him, made Prossy his slave and so many other women his admirers and, for that matter, made Candida choose him rather than Marchbanks. For her famous reasons for her choice—that Morell was weak for all his strength and Marchbanks strong for all his weakness—are all very well for Shavian comedy, but not quite enough for life. The choice, as expressed by Shaw, is too arbitrary; the reason too explicit. Candida, in the end, was choosing between two human beings rather than studying two problems, and there were biological considerations as well as maternal ones. Women are willing to play mother to their husbands only if they love the child.

Shaw is really more himself when the plot is forgotten; when, for example, Candida's arch-philistine father, her arch-moralist husband and her arch-romantic suitor are all making fools of one another, and of themselves; or, for my tastes, when Prossy is around.

Mildred Natwick's Prossy is a brilliant performance, done with that sense of showmanship which is one of Miss Natwick's best qualities; but never overdone. As Candida's father, Dudley Digges plays with all his witty deftness and sense of characterization; and Stanley Bell is attractive as the young curate. As for Katharine Cornell's Candida, it has grown mellower, less exalted, less conscious of its own radiance. It is simpler and more human; one of Miss Cornell's least mannered and most successful performances.